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The Pearl

BY GUSTAV KOBBE

A PEARL worn by a woman is more than a mere jewel. It is the most distinctively feminine article of adornment there is. Sexless, for after all a pearl is a thing, not a person, yet it ever has seemed so much a part of the personality of the woman it adorns, that it has come to partake of sex and may be regarded as the eternal feminine among jewels. I recall a lecturer speaking of an ancient necklace and saying that the women of today still wore their jewels as did the women of the most primitive times—next to, and thus in contact with, the body. And I seemed to realise then why so lovely an object as a pearl becomes so fair a part of the woman who wears it, and why a poet expressed in verse his longing to be the necklace that rose and fell, with every lightest breath, upon the bosom of his love. For from the very birth of the pearl within the shell, to the moment when it is reborn in the personality of her who wears it, it is fitted for the companionship of woman.

To begin with, pearl bearing mollusks are luxurious creatures. They protect their delicate bodies, covering the interior of their shells with a smooth lustrous material, steeped in rainbow hues of beautiful yet subdued opalescence. No matter how dull, how

heaped with coral, or overgrown with sponges or seaweeds the outside shell may be, all is clean and beautiful within the house, which is adorned with nacre or mother-of-pearl. This consists ordinarily of an accumulation of extremely thin semi-transparent films or laminae of a granular organic substance called conchiolin, with the intervals filled with calcareous matter. The mother-of-pearl decreases in thickness from the hinge toward the lip of the shell, and breaks a short distance from the extreme edge. Is it a wonder that a jewel so cleanly and delicately housed from its very birth and so immaculate in its progress toward perfection, appeals so strongly to woman with her sensitive nature? It is true that medieval writers had much to say regarding unripe or immature pearls, and have likened them to eggs in the body of a hen, which fall at a uniform rate of growth—a prosaic comparison which, however, is not entirely absent even from contemporaneous writings, as Messrs. Kunz and Stevenson point out in their elaborate and beautiful "Book of the Pearl." But, it is an interesting fact, that the simple mollusks, like the five wise virgins with the prepared lamps—note again how the pearl suggests woman and her care of herself—keep their gems perfect in beauty and

lustre at all times. "It matters not whether the pearl be removed when it is only the size of a pin-head or not until it reaches that of a marble, it is at all times a complete, a ripe, a perfect pearl, and the largest surpasses the smallest only in the characteristics and properties which are incidental to size." It is as if, in its mother-of-pearl boudoir, it sat before a mirror, imparting perfection and completion to its toilet every day, every moment, utilising the hours, and even the minutes, in enlarging its beautiful work for the benefit of its human sisters.

Even the pearl gatherers, at least those of the highest skill and type, seem to have respect for their occupation, as if they realised the rare distinction fate held in store for these jewels of the deep as the favourite ornaments of women. For the best type of Arab divers are very careful of themselves. They dry their body thoroughly with towels on coming out of the water. They indulge in intervals of rest during the day's work. Even while in the water, between dives, they may be seen enjoying the luxury of a cheroot or pipe, or a cigarette may be passed from mouth to mouth. During the period of work these divers are notably abstemious. After devotions at sunrise and a light breakfast of perhaps dates or rice and coffee, they begin the fishery. About noon they knock off for coffee, prayers and an hour's siesta, and then resume work for several hours. The day's work over, they face Meccaward with the customary prayers, then rest and eat a substantial meal usually of dates and fish roasted over a charcoal fire.

Thus, with these gatherers of pearls,

is everything well ordered, neat and cleanly. And they have faced Meccaward and prayed! A benison, perchance, upon the pearls. More likely, however, prayers for the safety of man, wherever he may be, and for the contents of his pocketbook, however ample, when he shall gaze upon woman rendered the fairer by the iridescence of these jewels born, like Venus, of the sea.

And mention of Venus reminds me that pearls were so highly prized by the ancient Greeks that they adorned their images of the goddess of Love with them—and not with mere sculptured imitations but with the real jewels themselves. This is beautifully shown in the lovely Tyszkiewicz bronze statuette of Aphrodite, since 1900 in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. This bronze Venus has even yet a pearl in fairly good state of preservation suspended from each ear by a spiral thread of gold that passes quite through the gem and also through the lobe of the ear. This Aphrodite has been described as "the most beautiful bronze Venus known." One expert attributes it more nearly to the period of Phidias (circa 500-430 B. C.) than to that of Praxiteles (circa 400-336 B. C.), another, Dr. Edward Robinson, disagrees with this opinion and refers it to the Hellenic period (circa 330-146 B. C.). But after all, supposing experts do not agree, what difference does it make, since this is a statue of a woman, and woman never grows old, whether she date from the Phidian period of 500 B. C. or the pannier period of 1912?

And speaking of this bronze Aphrodite is a reminder that pearls, once the property of aristocratic Greeks and

luxurious Romans, still are in existence, and some of them in a fairly good state of preservation. An example easily to be seen by every New Yorker is the necklace of pearls and gold, probably dating from the third century B. C., in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The love of the woman named Gellia for her pearls is familiar to all who know their Martial. "By no gods or goddesses does she swear, but by her pearls," writes this author of Gellia. "These she calls her sisters and brothers. She loves them more dearly than her two sons. Should she by some chance lose them, the miserable woman would not survive an hour." Seneca also relieved his mind regarding what he deemed woman's extravagance in these jewels. "Pearls offer themselves to my view. Simply one for each ear? No! The lobes of our ladies have attained a special capacity for supporting a great number. Two pearls alongside of each other, with a third suspended above, now form a single earring! the crazy fools seem to think that their husbands are not sufficiently tormented unless they wear the value of an inheritance in each ear."

Yet was neither Gellia nor any of the women berated by Seneca extravagant, since no pearl has ever gone begging for its price. The woman who wears the value of an inheritance in each ear has two inheritances, one from each lobe, to leave her children; and if she has even more fine pearls than these she has so many more inheritances to pass on to her descendants. For time never was when fine pearls would not fetch fine prices. In fact anyone who thinks that pearls today are high priced

as compared with former times is mistaken. For the valuations of pearls that have come down as traditions from antiquity, seem far more fabulous than those that appear to prevail today. Suetonius relates that the Roman general, Vitellus, paid all the expenses of a military campaign from funds derived from the sale of a single pearl from his mother's ears.

There also is the beautiful and oft-quoted Rabbinical story of Abraham and Sarah to show the high value set upon the pearl by the ancient Hebrews. In fact the story illustrates that there was but one thing in nature which the Hebrews valued above the most feminine of all gems—and that this one thing was woman herself.

As the tale runs, Abraham, on approaching Egypt, hid Sarah in a chest, that foreign eyes might not desecrate her beauty. When he reached the place for paying custom duties, the collector said, "Pay us the custom." When he replied, "I will pay your custom," they asked if he carried gold. "I will pay for gold," he said. Thereupon they said to him, "Perchance thou carriest the finest silk." "I will pay custom for the finest silk," he replied. Then said they, "Truly it must be pearls that thou takest with thee;" and he answered, "I will pay for pearls." Then, seeing that they could name nothing of value for which the patriarch was not willing to pay custom, they said, "It cannot be but thou must open the box and let us see what is within." So the chest was opened, and the land was illumined by the lustre of Sarah's beauty.

Even so prosaic a thing as a scientific name suggests the charm of association between woman and the pearl.

For to *Margaritifera*, from the Persian *Murwari* and signifying the pearl oyster, we owe the beautiful and romantic name of Marguerite, which thus means a pearl. There is no question but that the adaptation of the word as a proper name by the early Christians was prompted by the artless, yet exquisite beauty of the pearl, and by the highly poetical references to the gem in the Bible—in passages such as that likening woman to the “pearl of great price.” Doubtless the significance of the name has been enhanced by the pure lives and good deeds of such bearers of it as the virgin martyr, St. Margaret of Antioch, “the mild maid of God,” who early in the Christian era was regarded as the embodiment of feminine innocence and faith overcoming evil. She is often represented wearing a string of pearls, symbols of innocence and beauty. Margaret Aetheling was canonised in 1215 and so endeared the name among the Scotch that she was adopted as the patron saint of Scotland in 1673. And recall that other Margaret, who was called the “pearl of Bohemia.”

Again, consider the exquisite origins attributed to pearls by writers of fancy and how they lead one to associate them with all that is delicate and appealing in woman. Their chaste and subdued beauty has led poets of many countries to seek their origin in tears—tears of angels, water-nymphs, the lovely and the devoted. Scott writes of “pearls by naiads wept,” while Shakespeare speaks of “the liquid drops of tears that woman has shed, reappearing again, transformed to orient pearl, advantaging their loan with interest of a ten times double gain of happiness.”

With a handy volume of quotations one might fill pages with poetic references to pearls; those gems whose lustre so closely resembles that of the limpid, sparkling dewdrop as it receives the rays of the morning sun that the ancients conceived pearls to be formed from drops of dew or rain. This poetic legend has it that at certain seasons of the year, the pearl-oysters, rising to the surface of the water at sunrise, open their shells and breathe in the fresh, sparkling dew of early morn, each dewdrop being, in the course of time, transformed into a lustrous pearl, unless the air and sunlight are not received in sufficient quantities, when the pearl will not attain perfection and remains faulty in form, colour and lustre. Remarkable and even absurd as this fanciful theory may seem, it once was almost universally accepted and its mysticism still fascinates those who recognise human and especially feminine attributes in the pearl.

I also always have admired the enthusiastic tribute to the pearl by Pierre de Rosnel, who wrote, in the seventeenth century, that the pearl is a jewel so perfect that its excellent beauty demands the love and esteem of the whole universe, and quotes another writer to the effect that “the possession of the pearl is one of love’s greatest delights; the delight of possessing it suffices to feed love.” In a painting, Philostratus, who had the same ideas, has represented Cupids with bows enriched with pearls; and the ancients were all agreed to dedicate the pearl to Venus. Now, to my thinking, their reason for so doing was, that inasmuch as this goddess

of love, fairest of all divinities, is descended from heaven and is formed of the sea, so in like manner the pearl—the loveliest of all gems—is formed in the sea and is the offspring of the dew of heaven. But he that would learn more of the excellence of the pearl—I am still quoting from Pierre—let him inquire of the ladies, who will relate much more in its praise than I can write, and who will doubtless confess that nothing else so well adorns them. “The ladies will doubtless confess that nothing else so well adorns them!” “The possession of the pearl is one of love’s greatest delights!” Ever we come upon the delimitation of the boundary line between the pearl and the eternal feminine. The Aphrodite of the Boston Museum has been mentioned. The ancient Greeks recognised the dedication of the pearl to love and marriage. One of the choicest of ancient engraved gems, also in the Boston Museum, shows the marriage of Cupid and Psyche. In the design the lovers are united by a string of pearls—emblematic of conjugal bonds—by means of which the god Hymen gently guides them to the nuptial couch. This engraved gem was purchased out of the sale of the Marlborough gems, London, 1898.

Woman may be said to attain her greatest charm at the moment she emerges from maidenhood into the freer sweep of womanhood. And so the pearl is at the height of its perfection when taken from the shell. “When it is drawn from the depths of the ocean by the hand of man and given to the charmed gaze of the world, it is as complete and perfect in its way as the most beautiful work of God, and,

whether as tiny as the point of a pin or as large as a marble, it is always a perfect, fully formed, individual.” Such is the beautiful tribute paid in “The Book of the Pearl” to the perfect gem fresh from its nacreous cradle in the clean, cool depths of the sea.

Instances have been given of the love for pearls on the part of the women of antiquity. But in all times and especially during the fifteenth century enormous quantities of pearls were worn by persons of rank and fashion. A remarkable 1483 portrait of Margaret, wife of James III of Scotland, which is now preserved at Hampton Court, shows her wearing such wonderful pearl ornaments that she might well be called Margaret from her decorations. Her head-dress undoubtedly is the most remarkable pearl decoration in portraits of that century.

In the middle ages an aristocratic use for pearls was found in the costly bindings of the illuminated missals and chronicles, bindings finished in the highest degree of excellence and at vast expense. The script artist and miniaturist might devote his whole life to completing a single manuscript, so great was the detail and so exquisite the finish; and then the jeweller and binders would devise an appropriately costly housing. A remarkable specimen of these manuscript books in America is the Ashburnham manuscript of the Four Gospels, owned by Mr. Morgan.

And as this book is owned in America, let it be said here that the present fascination pearls have for American women is but a rekindling of a primitive passion on this continent. For long before America was made known

to the rest of the world by the voyage of Columbus, pearls were highly prized. That their magic charm had taken an irresistible hold on the aborigines and on the more highly civilised inhabitants of Mexico and Peru, was shown in the palaces of Montezuma which were studded with pearls, while the Aztec kings possessed pearls of inestimable value. That they must have been collected all over the continent, even in prehistoric times, is evidenced by the large quantities discovered in the mounds of the Ohio Valley, which are among the most ancient works of man in America. As in the Old World, so in what we are pleased to call the New, they had been applied as decoration to idols, temples and palaces as well as used by men and women.

Thus it was that the principal immediate effect of Columbus's discovery and its resultant commerce, was the great wealth of pearls which began to reach the Spanish traders. The Spaniards had sought gold. They found pearls. There were rich native fisheries on the coast of Venezuela, and later others were found on the Pacific Coast of Panama and Mexico, until venturous voyagers returned to Spain with such large collections of pearls that, in the language of one of the old chroniclers—"they were to every man like chaff." For many years America, now current in common speech as the land of money, was known in Seville, Cadiz and Europe generally as the land of pearls. Until the development of the mines in Mexico and Peru, the value of the pearls exceeded that of all the other loot combined. For who is there to say that it was not rank and often

cruel robbery that was carried on in the fair name of commerce? In fact, for two centuries following the discovery of America, extravagance in personal adornment became a rage at European courts, and the pearls exceeded in quantity that of all other times. They were worn in enormous numbers by persons of rank and fortune, as is apparent not only from antiquarian records and historical accounts, but from paintings and engravings of the time as well—from portraits of the Hapsburgs, the Valois, the Medicis, the Borgias, the Tudors and the Stuarts, all showing vast quantities of pearls, and, what is significant, relatively few other gems.

Of the great women of that period two were especially noted for their passion for pearls. These were Catherine of Medici and Queen Elizabeth. Glance at almost any of their portraits. They are nearly always represented as wearing elaborate pearl ornaments. Their pictures show to what extent they carried their passion for pearls. Other women, not far behind them, included Mary Stuart, Maria of Medici and Henrietta Maria. And while it breaks upon my motif, which is the femininity of the pearl, I must record that men also wore pearls to an extravagant extent. Nearly all the portraits of Francis I, Henry II, Charles IX, and Henry III of France; James I, and Charles I of England, besides of other celebrities, show at least one great pear-shaped pearl in one ear, while many portraits show pearls on the hats, cloaks, gloves and other coverings. The "Antiquarian Repertory" is authority for the statement that, when the Duke of Buckingham went to Paris, in 1625, to

bring over Henrietta Maria as queen to Charles I, he had, in addition to twenty-six other suits, "a rich suit of purple satin, embroidered all over with rich orient pearls, the cloak made after the standard mode, with all things suitable, the value whereof will be twenty thousand pounds, and this, it is thought, shall be for the wedding day at Paris."

This digression from the feminine motif may justify the introduction here of some points, more or less technical perhaps, but far from uninteresting. For example, the qualifications that determine the value of a pearl. These are, that it should be perfectly round, pear-shaped, drop-shaped, egg-shaped or button-shaped, and as even in form as though it were turned on a lathe. Its skin must be perfectly clear and of a decided colour or tint—white, pink, creamy, gray brown or black. If white it must be unclouded and have neither flaw nor haze; nor should the skin have, in the slightest degree, the appearance of being opaque or dead. Absolutely free from all cracks, scratches, spots, flaws, indentations, shadowy reflections and blemishes of any kind, it must possess, in addition, the peculiar lustre or "orient" characteristic of the gem, a skin unbroken, and no evidence of having been polished.

The colour of pearls has no connection whatever with their lustre, but is the same as that of the shell in which they are formed. Black pearls come from the black shells of Mexico and pink pearls from the pink-hued shells found in the Bahamas. Ceylon pearls usually are white. From Sharks Bay come yellow or straw-coloured and from Venezuela pearls of yellow tinge. Other

localities yield pearls simulating every tint of the rainbow, besides black and white. The most common, and fortunately the most desirable colour, is white or rather silver or rather *claire de lune*. "La gran Margherita," Dante calls it. Yellow, pink and black pearls also are numerous; and there are piebald pearls—a portion white and the rest pink or brown or black. The authors of the book already referred to mention a large bean-shaped pearl of great lustre, one-half of which was white and the other quite black, the dividing-line being sharply defined in the plane of the greatest circumference. From Mexico, the South Sea Islands and the American rivers come pearls noted for the great variety of their coloration in practically every known tint and shade.

Even the foregoing paragraph in itself suffices to convey the information that in geographic range, the sources of pearls are widely distributed. Each of the six continents yields its tribute to woman. But the most profitable pearl fisheries are restricted in area. Probably most valuable as well as most ancient are those of the Persian Gulf, which give employment to some 30,000 divers. While the yield in the ancient fisheries of the Gulf of Manaar is uncertain, it sometimes is remarkably large. The Red Sea fisheries, extensive in the Ptolemaic period, are now of slight importance. Other Asiatic fisheries are found in the Gulf of Aden, about Merque Archipelago, on the coast of China, Japan, Korea and Siam, as well as in the rivers of China, Manchuria and Siberia. An interesting phenomenon was the migration of the pearl oyster into the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal. Whether

it was an exploring party or a personally conducted tour by the Cook of the oyster world, and whether the oyster really came out of its shell, has not yet been divulged by any of the tourists.

The great pearl producer in the family of pearl-oysters is the *Margaritifera vulgaris*. For centuries it has sustained the great pearl fisheries of Ceylon, India and Persia, and still yields the bulk of pearls on the market. While it produces relatively few large ones, rarely exceeding twelve grains in weight, its pearls usually are silvery white, and command the highest prices for their size, because of their beautiful form and superior lustre. Excepting the Venezuelan species, *Margaritifera vulgaris* is the only pearl-oyster supporting extensive fisheries exclusively for pearls. In all other species the value of the shells is considerable and in some localities represents several times as much as the income from the pearls.

Remarkable stories are told of the length of time that pearl divers can remain under water. Some of these stories sound decidedly "fishy." It is said that in equal depths the Arab fishermen remain under water longer than those of India who work the Ceylon fishery. But the latter descend more frequently. When preparing to remain long under water, the fisherman takes in large quantities of air.

The length of time divers remain submerged in an average depth of seven or eight fathoms rarely exceeds sixty seconds. Some may remain seventy, eighty or even ninety seconds on special occasions, and there is a fully substantiated instance from Manaar, of an Arab diver having remained 109 seconds in seven fathoms of water.

Even the date, April 13th, 1887, is given and the feat was witnessed and reported by Captain James Donnan, inspector of the fishery. In a diving contest in the Persian Gulf only one man out of hundreds who competed, remained down 110 seconds; the depth, however, is not indicated. These instances are not miraculous, but when it comes to one or two hours of submergence as noted by Ibn Batuta about the year 1336, the half hour of Diemberoeck in 1672, the quarter hour of Vernatti in 1669, the seven and a half minutes of Chardin in 1711, the six minutes of Percival in 1803, as compared with the hundred and ten seconds of the present time, it seems either that there has been a gradual but remarkable decrease in the ability of the Asiatic divers to remain under water and that the pearl fishermen of today are of a very different species from their predecessors, or that the Ananias Club should confer posthumous membership upon several of the illustrious deceased. Yet the above records are authorised and representative publications of their respective periods; nor is there an intimation previous to 1675 that the limit of time was less than ten minutes. But reporters who take advantage of the gullibility of their readers are not unknown even today.

The demand for pearls by American women has resulted not only from the increased wealth of the country, but also from its development in taste and culture. With the love for art has come the appreciation of pearls and their exquisite suggestion of femininity. Few jewels were worn here before the Civil War. There was no great wealth and simplicity of taste in personal deco-

ration prevailed. With the post-bellum fortunes and splurge came a great demand for gems, and the most showy ones were selected, especially diamonds. This demand was met by the discovery of the South African mines with their great yield. Diamonds became so popular here that an enormous diamond in the shirt-front was properly regarded as the sure emblem of American vulgarity. But for some thirty years and especially during the last decade, in Europe as well as in America, in fact wherever gems are worn, luxury has found in pearls a refinement, associated with richness and beauty, and exceeding that of diamonds and other crystal gems, until now they may be said to have taken the highest rank among jewels. This change in fashion, the increase in wealth and consequent vastly greater demands and higher prices, have resulted in greatly extending the field of search, and many new localities have been brought into the field of production.

The first awakening to a realisation of the value of fresh-water pearls in America occurred in 1857, when several beautiful pearls came into the market from the central part of New Jersey. The story is told in "The Book of the Pearl" and its scene, of all places in the world, is Paterson. A shoemaker named David Howell, who lived on the outskirts of that city occasionally relieved the monotony of his trade by a fishing excursion to some neighboring stream, where he would usually collect a "mess" of mussels. Returning from one of these visits to Notch Brook in the spring of 1857, the mussels were fried with the usual abund-

ance of grease and heat. After this preparation, and when they were opened for the cobbler's feast, one of them was found to contain a large, round pearl weighing "nearly 400 grains," which possibly might have proven the finest of modern times, had not its lustre and beauty been destroyed by the heat and grease. Had the pearl been discovered in time, its value might have exceeded \$25,000, so that poor Howell's fried mussels made one of the most expensive of suppers.

Hoping to duplicate this wonderful find, Howell collected and searched other mussels and his example was followed by several of his neighbours. Within a few days a magnificent pink pearl was found by a Paterson carpenter named Jacob Quackenbush. It weighed 93 grains, was sold in New York for \$1500, and later in Paris for 12,500 francs (\$2,500) to a French dealer who disposed of it to the then young and beautiful Empress Eugénie, from whom and its own great lustre, it derived the name "Queen Pearl." Today its value would be many times its original purchase price.

In fact, pearls have never gone down in price, but have steadily advanced in value surely during the last three centuries and probably for a much longer period. To buy a beautiful pearl is as safe as it is to buy a painting by one of the great masters. It will be worth more tomorrow than it is today. Pearls of one hundred grains are even more rare at the present time than are diamonds of one hundred carats. Until about seventy-five years ago the diamonds of the world weighing one hundred carats or over could be counted on the fingers. But since the opening

of the African mines, in 1870, the number of large diamonds has increased at a much greater ratio than have the pearls of one-quarter of their weight. It would thus seem that pearls of great size are worth four times as much as diamonds of equal weight.

I have told the story of the Roman general Vitellus, who provided all the money needed for a campaign by the sale of one pearl from his mother's ear. A curious experience was that of a London expert who was asked by a London banking syndicate to proceed to the East, to value a large collection of jewels which was offered as security for a heavy sum of money about to be advanced to a certain Power to provide the sinews of war. On his way he stopped over in Germany and bought some jewels which had been valued for probate but were not easy to sell in that market. The valuation paper was shown to him, and after examining the jewels, he took them at the inventory prices. Among them was an old gold brooch of Russian make, valued at twenty dollars. In the centre was what seemed to be a piece of hematite. In reality it was a fine, round, black pearl weighing seventy-seven grains. The colour had faded from exposure to the sun, but when the pearl was brought to London and the outer layer taken off, the perfect gem was uncovered. It was sold to a jeweler in London for \$2,000; but having heard that in Paris there was a pearl that would exactly match it, the expert bought it back at an advance of a thousand dollars and sold it, at a large profit, to one of the crown jewelers of France who, in turn, sold the pair for \$10,000. To-day they probably are worth five times

that sum. When the Spanish merchant, Gogilus, invested a great sum in one fine pearl, he was asked by Philip IV, "How have you ventured to put all your fortune into such a small object?" "Because I knew there was a king of Spain to buy it of me," was the quick reply. And Philip rewarded the faith of the jeweler by purchasing the pearl. Even so, the price he paid may have been small compared with the wealth in pearls owned by some American women and with the value of several European collections. The most valuable pearl necklace in the world—because the most beautiful—probably is in this country.

Pearl! Fair enow for princes' pleasure,
So deftly set in gold so pure,—
From Orient lands I durst avouch,
Ne'er saw I a gem its peer,—
So round, so comely shaped withal,
So small, with sides so smooth,—
Where'er I judged of radiant gems,
I placed my pearl supreme.

So reads a stanza in the Old English poem, "The Pearl," which I cannot refrain from quoting in the quaint original, in which the pearl is referred to in the feminine gender:

Perle pleasante to prynces paye,
To clenly clos in gold so clere,
Oute of Oryent I hardyly saye,
Ne proved I never her precios pere,
So rounde, so reken in uche a raye,
So small, so smothe her sydez were,—
Queresoever I jugged gemmez gaye,
I sette hyr singeley in synglere.

The Orient having been a source of supply for pearls since ancient days, there is little wonder that great collections of these gems are to be found in the East and many allusions to them in its literature. Fantastic theories regarding them, in ancient Chinese liter-

ature, credit them as originating in the brain of the fabled dragon; and as having been especially abundant during the reigns of the illustrious emperors. They were used as amulets and charms against fire and other disasters; they are spoken of as so brilliant as to have been visible at a distance of nearly a thousand yards, and that rice could be cooked by the light from them. A pearl found near the beginning of the Christian era at Yangchow-fu, in the province of Kiang-su, was recorded as so lustrous that it was visible in the dark.

Coin and gem portraits of Persian queens often show ear-pendants of pearls. The remains of a necklace of pearls and other stones dating from the fourth century B. C., were found in the sarcophagus of an Achaemenid princess exhumed at Susa or Shuslan, the winter residence of the kings of Persia. This necklace, which likely is the most ancient pearl ornament still in existence, is in the Persian Gallery of the Louvre. Even without further evidence, it would be a warranted assumption that pearls were as widely known among the Iranians in antiquity as among the Hindus, since the Persian Gulf, like the Indian Ocean, has been famous for its fisheries from ancient times.

The wealth in jewels possessed by oriental monarchs, notables and dealers, which has been the theme of story and tradition time out of mind, may have been doubted in western countries. But whoever has witnessed or read accounts of important social functions or state occasions where East Indian rajahs or nabobs were present, can realise that the profusion of jewels

which they wear simply is amazing to Western eyes. And why not? For these objects represent the hoarding of generations, handed down from father to son in long succession; with the additional and perfectly known value that whenever necessity arises, they can be turned into available funds.

The Eastern manner of keeping and selling pearls is different from ours. If it be a question of buying gems from an Eastern owner, the best never are shown first. On the contrary, the most inferior are brought forth and the purchaser must be content with these, until he proves clearly that he is a substantial buyer or has the knowledge and appreciation of a keen judge of such objects. The order in which they are produced is, first the poorest, then successively, poor, medium, fair, good and fine, and, at last, the rarest and most wonderful treasures.

To a visitor, an oriental dignitary's jewel treasures are not all shown at once, nor even as a Western collector or connoisseur might display them in a cabinet. The visitor may be shown a few objects in the first day or hour; perhaps a few more later in the day; some on the next day or the one following; and so on. He even may continue a guest for weeks and never see all, or the finest of the jewels belonging to his host. Moreover, when they are produced, they are found not to be in iron caskets or in gold or silver jewel cases, covered or lined with fine leather or with silk or satin. On the contrary, they often are in old ginger jars, shabby boxes, tin cans, and all sorts of unsightly or unpromising receptacles, which, when placed, between the owner and his guest, may well cause the latter

to wonder. Nor is his surprise lessened as the wrappings are unfolded, one after another, until after a dozen old cloths have been laid aside, the pearl is disclosed to view, for the first time possibly in months or even years.

"In the early sixties, when most American women aspired to own a pair of diamond earrings," say the authors of "The Book of the Pearl," "it was not uncommon for ladies to start with a hundred, two hundred, five hundred, or a thousand-dollar pair, and, for a dozen years to come, to add an annual sum of one hundred, two hundred or five hundred dollars to increasing the size of this by exchanging them with the dealer at the cost price and paying the difference between the value of the pair that had been purchased and that of the new pair. In this way ladies who never would have thought of spending five thousand dollars for a pair of earrings, gradually made a savings bank of the jewels. Now this is frequently done with pearls. A small necklace or a few pearls will be purchased; these are added to annually or at such times as the owner may have spare savings or gifts to invest. It is not uncommon for a family to buy a pearl for a daughter on her first birthday, and each succeeding year add one pearl to this, so that she may first wear one pearl, then two, then three, and by the time the young lady makes her *début* in society, a good start has been made toward a pearl necklace. It was the custom of

King Humbert of Italy to present his queen, Margherita, with one fine pearl every year, and with this succession of annual gifts she possessed one of the finest collections in Europe."

Of the crystal gems—the diamonds, rubies, etc.—which practically are of unlimited longevity, existing thousands of years in unchanged condition, the earth contains as many as it ever did, save for those which have been discovered by men. It is not unreasonable to suppose that in the course of time a considerable percentage of the total will be discovered. But in both seas and rivers, the longevity of pearls is restricted.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear.

Such gems may run their course of existence and depart unhonored and unsung. The harvest must be gathered with promptness or it is wasted. Most likely only a small percentage of the beautiful pearls produced in the green depths have gladdened human eyes.

There have been and are a few men who possess so delicate a touch or so fine a sense of feeling, that they can estimate the weight of a pearl simply by holding it in the hand. This accomplishment is said to have been possessed by Julius Cæsar. But though Cæsar's wife was supposed to be above suspicion, could he tell by an equally simple method, a glance of the eye, the worth, in character and consistency, of the woman whose pearl he was weighing in his hand?

FROM a Middle English poem, "The Pearl," a stanza, both in its quaint fourteenth century diction and in a modernised version, is quoted in the

foregoing article. It would be interesting to give the entire poem, but as the number of stanzas exceeds one hundred, this is not practical. However,

it is possible to give readers of *THE LOTUS* some idea of "The Pearl," and its sweet and pure significance.

There are at least five modernised versions of this exquisite fourteenth century (Middle English) poem, which voices one of the most poignant of human griefs—grief for the death of a little child, her father's "pearl;" and imparts, through dream and visions, the Christian consolation. No lover of the poem doubts its genuine elegiac character. The father's sorrow is too profound for allegory.

"Alas! I lost my pearl of old!
I pine with heart-pain unforgot."
"I mourn my pearl, dear beyond cost,
And strange fears with my fancy fought;
My will in wretchedness was lost,
And yet Christ comforted my thought."

As that admirable literary periodical, "The Dial," pointed out several years ago in a brief but, for the layman, adequate analysis, there falls upon the mourner, praying at the flower-grown grave, a sleep in which he beholds beyond a sundering river, a maiden, "glimmering white" in fair linen bordered with pearls, the Bride of the Lamb, his little daughter already a queen in heaven. She teaches him the mysteries of faith, and guides him to a hill-top whence he catches a glimpse of the New Jerusalem. The essential content of the threnody—its anguish of loss, its wistful look into Paradise—is all universally appealing; and we may well be grateful to any and all translators who re-phrase the mediæval into modern without sacrificing all of the rich pathos and beauty.

"The Pearl"—this pearl of poetry—but barely escaped oblivion, surviving the centuries in a single manuscript. Bound up with three other Middle Eng-

lish poems, "Cleanness" (or Purity), "Patience," "Sir Gawain" and the "Grene Knight," it long lay unregarded among the riches of the British Museum. The Early English Text Society gave it to scholars in 1864; and Mr. Israel Gollanz in 1891 extended the gift to all, printing the text on the left-hand pages, with a line for line and stanza for stanza rendering on the right. This translation, though making no attempt at rhyme, has the look of stanzas and a certain rhythmic movement, together with a force and fineness of phrasing that contributed to a general poetic effect.

It is in discussing various modernised versions of "The Pearl" and in assigning to Miss Sophie Jewett's transcription the palm of merit, that "The Dial" gives this interesting little history of the poem which Mr. Gollanz, from internal evidence, assigns to the year 1330. The poet's name is unknown. But Miss Jewett prefaces her version with the following delicate tribute to his genius.

Poet of beauty, pardon me
If touch of mine have tarnished
Thy Pearl's pure lustre, loved by thee;
Or dimmed thy vision of the dead
Alive in light and gaiety.
Thy life is like a shadow fled;
Thy place we know not, nor degree,
The stock that bore thee, school that bred;
Yet shall thy fame be sung and said.
Poet of wonder, pain, and peace,
Hold high thy nameless, laurelled head
Where Dante dwells with Beatrice.

Thus "The Pearl" and the pearl—poetry and gem and the father's sorrow for the little girl who was his "orient" jewel, merge in this example of mediæval English literature, which, like a real pearl from the deep, has been rescued from oblivion.